THE

HOUMAS LAND CLAIM;

A LETTER

FROM JOHN CLAIBORNE, ESQ., TO THE HON. C. T. BEMISS,

ACCOMPANIED BY A LETTER

FROM THE HON. JOHN SLIDELL TO MR. CLAIBORNE.

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THE HOUMAS CLAIM.

A Letter to the Hon. Cyrus T. Bemis, Member of the General Assembly of Louisiana.

New Orleans, April 12, 1859.

Dear Sir,—In accordance with your request, made several weeks ago, that I would furnish you with authentic information as to the nature and history of the Houmas Land Claim, and its present condition, I have examined into the official archives at the Land Office in this city, as also into other official documents, and shall proceed, as briefly as may be compatible with a full and fair view of the subject, to state the result of my labors.

The French and Spanish laws for the government of the Colony of Louisiana, as those Powers successively held it, permitted to the Indian tribes the occupation of the lands upon which their villages and fields were situated, but the Crown reserved to itself the title to the soil. Previous to the year 1774 the Houmas and Bayagoulas, together occupied a considerable tract fronting on the Mississippi, in what is now the parish of Ascension. About that date three gentlemen, Messrs. Maurice Conway, Latil and McNamara, with the consent of the Colonial authorities, bought of the Indians their rights to a tract occupied by them, about twenty-two leagues above this city, on the left bank of the river, with the customary depth of forty arpents, by a river front of ninety-six arpents. Subsequently, Maurice Conway purchased the rights of his associates, and became thus the sole proprietor of the land. In the month of September, 1776, Conway presented to the Governor of the Colony his petition, in which he alleged his ownership of the tract above described, and stated that, owing to the absence of timber on it, the Cypress Swamp being then, as he said, more

than a league and half from the river bank, he stood in need of the vacant lands in the rear of his property, all of which, embraced within the limits of the side lines of his property, protracted in the same directions, he prayed might be granted him. The Governor ordered Louis Andry, the Second Adjutant of the post at New Orleans, and who, it appears, was frequently employed in making surveys in the Colony, to proceed to the land of Conway, and to ascertain and fix the boundaries of the vacant lands in the rear, as prayed for by him, in such manner that no injury might be done any other persons, and then to put Conway into possession of them, making a return of his doings to the Governor, in order that a title in form, in Conway's favor, might be made out. This work was performed by Andry in the month of October following, in presence of Don Louis Judice, the Commandant of the Post of Lafourche, (now Donaldsonville) Maurice Conway, the proprietors of the adjacent lands on the upper and lower limits, and the Chief of the Houmas and Bayagoulas, for whom Judice acted as interpreter. Andry first proceeded to an examination of the boundaries of the front tracts, and certified that he found the stakes and landmarks the same as he had himself placed there in 1773, and that he afterwards ran the upper and lower lines on the same compass direction for the length of two arpents in the rear of the stakes or posts at the rear extremities of the said lines, at which distance he placed other posts, describing their height and the wood of which they were made, so that the direction of the prolongation of the side lines might be clearly seen, and then put Conway into possession of the vacant lands included by the lines to be so protracted.

On the 21st June, 1777, Governor Galvez, in pursuance of what had been done in the premises under the orders of his predecessor, Unzaga, made out in favor of Maurice Conway, a formal title or concession, by which he vested in him the property of the vacant lands in the rear of his front tract, within the limits and boundaries so determined by Andry.

You will thus see that by the laws of the Province, Maurice Conway became the full and complete owner of all the vacant lands covered by said grant, twenty-three years before Louisiana was retroceded to France, and twenty-six years before the latter Power ceded it to the United States,

under a treaty, by the third clause of which the inhabitants were solemnly guaranteed in their rights of property ; the United States becoming entitled only to vacant lands, forts, &c., &c.

As the back limit of the vacant lands so granted to Maurice Conway, in 1777, was not absolutely fixed by Andry, or Galvez, in the act of Concession, we must have recourse to the contemporaneous acts of the private parties in interest, or of Government officers, to show how far the lands so conveyed to Conway did extend. Fortunately for the cause of truth and justice, such testimony is by no means wanting ; for on the 5th March, 1778, Conway sold, by act before Don Andre Almonaster y Roxas, the King's notary, to Oliver Pollock, thirty arpents in front of the property so acquired, with a depth extending to the lake. (A glance at the map of the State will show that the only lake in the rear was Maurepas.) On the 5th day of February, 1795, William Conway, who held by conveyance from his uncle Maurice, mortgaged in favor of Alex. Baudin, a portion of the same lands having a front of thirty arpents by a depth to the Lake, by a notarial act ; and on the 7th day of April, 1798, he also mortgaged in favor of John Joyce another portion with a front of thirty arpents, and a depth to the Lake ; and on the 12th of August, 1798, at a public succession sale made under the orders of Don Juan Ventura Morales, the Intendant of the Province, of a portion of the same Maurice Conway lands, which had been purchased of him by Col. St. Maxent, the property was described as having a front of twenty-nine arpents, by a depth of about four leagues ; and in the adjudication to Louis Faure, who bought it, was described as having that front, by the depth which could be found, opening about thirty-six degrees. Another glance at the map will show that the line of four leagues thus spoken of, extended towards the Amite river. It is well to remember that Morales, as Intendant, was also Royal Treasurer of the Province, and was, a few months after that date, charged with the disposition of the Royal domain, which power was taken away from the Governor General on his recommendation, and he would scarcely have permitted the sale, as private property, of lands which were vacant, and therefore a part of the Royal domain. Indeed, if there had been any want of power in Galvez to make the grant in 1777, it was fully cured by the ordinance issued by Morales in his new character, on the 17th

of July, 1799, which ratified all titles of the inhabitants held under formal titles from former Governors.

The first step taken by Congress to carry out the obligations of the treaty of cession was the passage of an act in 1805 for ascertaining and adjusting titles and claims to land in the Territory of Orleans and District of Louisiana, (Brightley's Digest, 532,) by which a Board of Commissioners, to be composed of the Register for the District, and two other persons, to be appointed by the President, were to hear and decide on claims founded not only on French or Spanish grants made and completed before October 1st, 1800—the date of the Treaty of San Ildefonso—but also on other specified classes of claims. The parties claiming under such complete grants might deposit with the Register, the grant, order, survey, or other evidence on which they relied, and the Board, or a majority of them, were to decide summarily, and according to "justice and equity," on all claims filed. The Board, as at first constituted for the Territory of Orleans, was composed of John W. Gurley, the Register, Joshua Lewis, who long presided in the First Judicial District Court of this city, a man revered for his probity and learning, and Benedict Van Pradelles, who, if I am not in error, was an accomplished and experienced Notarial Public, familiar with the French and Spanish languages, and the laws, usages and customs of the colony previous to the cession to the United States. They began the discharge of their duties in December, 1805. On the 20th February, 1806, William Conway filed, with the Register, his claim to a portion of the lands so bought or granted to Maurice Conway in 1774 and 1777, and the records of his titles is preceded by a figurative plan of the tract claimed, drawn by Barthelemy Lafon, a deputy U. S. Surveyor, showing a front on the Mississippi, and side lines extending back below to Lake Maurepas, and above to the Amite river. About the same time Daniel Clark and John W. Scott and William Donalson, who also claimed under the Maurice Conway purchase and grant, presented their claims to other portions of the land, with fronts on the Mississippi, and side lines opening to the rear and extending to the Iberville or Amite rivers. All these claims, with the testimony and titles sustaining them, are of record in the Land Office in this city, as is also the book containing the minutes of the proceedings of the Commissioners, an examination of which showed

that on Monday, the 3d day of March, 1808, the Board—all its members being present—considered the claim No. 125, being that of William Conway, and its finding is thus recorded :

"No. 125. William Conway claims another tract of land situated in the county of Acadia, at the place called the Houmas, on the left bank of the Mississippi, containing twenty-two and a half arpents in front, with an opening toward the rear of sixty degrees forty-five minutes, the upper line running north nine degrees fifteen minutes east, three hundred and fifty-one arpents, and the lower line directed north, seventy degrees east, and measuring four hundred and fifty-five arpents, bounded on the upper side by Daniel Clark's land, and on the lower by land of Simon Laveau. It appearing to the Board, from a patent or complete title exhibited, that seventeen arpents of front were, together with a greater quantity, granted by the Spanish Government to Maurice Conway, 21st June, 1777, and it appearing that the five and a half arpents of the front remaining of the land aforesaid were purchased by Pierre Part at the public sale of the estate of the late Joachim Mire alias Belony, on the 7th day of December, 1788, and it further appearing to the Board from the several instruments of conveyance offered in testimony, that the two tracts of land aforesaid have been conveyed to the present claimant, the Board do hereby confirm his claim aforesaid."

The claim of Daniel Clark, No. 127, was considered the same day and confirmed—the side lines running back to Amite river ; and the survey offered in evidence having been made in 1805 by Lafon, under the orders of Governor Claiborne, then exercising all the powers formerly held by the Governors-General of the Colony. And on Monday, 10th of March, 1806, the claim of Scott and Donalson, No. 133, under a survey made in 1804, by order of the same authority, was also considered and confirmed by the Board, *all the members being again present*. In each case the decision was unanimous, which fact it becomes the more proper to state, because it has frequently been asserted, and on one occasion, at least, has been admitted in a pleading, that the confirmation was made by only a majority of the Board, and that Thomas Bolling Robertson was then a member and dissented. The truth is, that he was not a member of the Board at all until the 26th day of May, 1808, one of the members, J. W. Gurley, having died on the 3d of March preceding. Consequently, these cases were adjudged things so far as the Board of Commissioners were concerned, between the United States and claimants, more than two years

before Mr. Robertson ever sat in the Board ; and when, according to the terms of the act of Congress under which it had been named, the report of its decisions in the cases before it should have been before Congress for its action. But the Board seems to have gone on in the investigation of claims brought before it, not only of the character specified in the act of 1805, but also of those included within the provisions of another act of 1807, and no report was made for several years afterwards, nor was Congress made acquainted with its decisions until the report made by Mr. Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury, on the 9th of January, 1812 ; nor was any action by Congress on the report or any of the cases embraced in it, had until two years afterwards, when, on the 12th of April, 1814, an act was passed for the final adjustment of land titles in the State of Louisiana and Territory of Missouri. And on the 18th of April, 1814, another concerning certificates of confirmation of claims to lands in the State of Louisiana was also passed. Time rolled on, and meanwhile the lands included within the Houmas Grant became yearly of greater value to their owners, though no final adjustment of the matter was made by the officers of the General Land Office, or the Secretary of the Treasury at Washington City. But by the provisions of the act of March 3d, 1811, all lands in this State which were the subject of private claims, were reserved from sale or entry ; a provision of law which to this day remains unrepealed, and under which there has been a vast and almost incredible amount of discussion, as the records of that Bureau will show.

All settlers, therefore, upon any portion of the lands included within the alleged limits of the Houmas claim, confirmed as above stated, in 1806, have been from the beginning, and still are trespassers, either as against the United States—if the Spanish grant should be held to have been invalid, or not to have covered the area confirmed by the Board—or as against the representatives of the original purchasers and grantee, if the concession was complete and valid, and the boundaries are really as claimed by those parties. These settlers, and the speculators by whom they are said in many instances to be backed, are thus without legal right, and as the existence of the claims and of their confirmation by the Commissioners

have been notorious throughout the whole region, they would seem to be without equity, as their possession, if they had any at all, was with full notice of the prior claims on the land.

A survey of the tract, as described in the patent of Galvez, June 21, 1777, was made by lawful surveyors in 1840 and 1841, which was approved September 15, 1841, by the U. S. Surveyor General. The parties in interest holding under mesne conveyances from Conway, obtained from the Hon. George M. Bibb, Secretary of the Treasury, in the year 1844, a recognition of their long delayed rights, and on the 12th day of August of that year, that distinguished and able lawyer wrote a letter of instructions to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, in which he decided that the cases had been covered by the provisions of the above named act of 18th of April, 1814 ; that the parties in whose favor the Commissioners had confirmed the claims 125, 127 and 133, included in Mr. Gallatin's report of January 9, 1812, or their representatives, were entitled to patents for the lands so confirmed ; and that the sums which had been paid by parties who had been permitted to make entries on portions of the lands included in the claims, contrary to the prohibitions of the act of 1811, should have their money refunded. The records of the Land Office will prove that this was done in many instances.

But the opponents to the claim were not disposed to let the matter stop thus, for, by their efforts and representations at Washington, they succeeded in obtaining the passage by Congress of a joint resolution on the 26th of June, 1846, by which the Attorney-General of the United States was directed to inquire into the validity of the title, and whether any patent had been improperly or unlawfully issued in the case of the Houmas grant, and to report thereon ; and in case a patent had been so issued, the President was requested to cause legal proceedings to be taken to have its validity judicially determined. Under this joint resolution, Mr. Clifford, the Attorney-General, made a report in 1847, in which, after examining the case as he understood it, he came to the conclusion that the grant by Galvez on the 21st of June, 1777, in favor of Maurice Conway only covered forty-two arpents of land in depth from the river, including his front tract of forty arpents in depth. Now, when it is remembered that

Conway, when he asked for the rear vacant lands in 1776, alleged that he was already the owner of the forty arpents in front, that he needed timber for his plantation, and that the timber was no nearer than a league and a half, or at least three miles, from the river, and considering, also, that about twenty-seven arpents front are about equal to a mile, this conclusion of the Attorney-General was most unaccountable and inexplicable. Of what possible benefit could it have been to Maurice Conway to have a strip of two arpents tacked on to the rear line of his plantation, which practically put him no nearer to the timber which he so much needed? Is it to be reasonably supposed that when he asked for *all the vacant lands* in his rear, following the directions of his side lines, and had had those lines prolonged in the manner certified by Captain Andry, that the Governor intended to grant, and he was willing to receive after all his pains, only two additional arpents in depth to those he already owned, and upon which, according to his petition, there could have been no timber? But be this as it may, the President in 1849 directed suits to be brought to annul the patents issued in favor of Clark's representatives and others, by his predecessor in 1844, and in the bill of complaint filed by the District Attorney, for the first time was the intimation of fraud or mal-practices thrown out against the claimants under the Spanish grant, for it never had been done by Congress, nor, so far as the records show, by any Government official previous to that date. An immense mass of official documentary and other evidence was brought forward by the defendants to support the validity of their titles, and they emphatically and successfully repelled the charge made by the bill, of fraud and false information, in obtaining the patent. It is said again, that Judge Campbell of the Supreme Court, held that the claim was fraudulent. A copy of his decree in the case is now before me, and, so far from sustaining such a charge, it very decidedly negatives it; for after stating that the claim No. 127, the one in favor of Daniel Clark, and which was before the Court, had been confirmed by the Board of Commissioners, and that the act of 1811 had provided that no land should be offered for sale a claim to which had been in due time filed before the Register for investigation, until the decision of Congress was made thereon, he says of the act of 1811: "This act is one founded on the plainest principles of justice, and has been uniformly maintained, in the fullness of its

spirit, by the Supreme Court of the United States. Nothing would be more inequitable than an attempt on the part of the United States to involve the claimants, whom they had brought before their own tribunals, with the expectation that their rights would be ascertained in a summary way, but in a spirit of equity and liberality *in litigations with other claimants deriving their titles ex post facto from the United States;* no such conduct has been countenanced by Congress, though this case shows very wanton violations of the act of 1811, by subordinate officers of the Land Office department," and again, "The land embraced in this claim was thus protected from sale until the pleasure of Congress upon the report of the Board of Commissioners should be made known." He then proceeded to declare, that he did not believe that the provisions of the act of April 18, 1814, were applicable to the case; for, said he, "The act does not apply to any of the claims upon which the final action of Congress was required to impart to them validity, or to relieve them from the burden of a claim on the part of the United States. The favorable judgment of the Commissioners in regard to the Houmas claim is not adopted by this act, nor does the act empower the President to renounce the claim of the United States to it. The patent, consequently, was issued without the authority of law."[1] And he concludes, "I do not decide any question upon the validity of the defendants' title to the land they claim, nor upon the effect of any acts of the officers of the Land Office in respect to determining its boundaries, nor the effect of the patent, in any other respect than that of its being a paper issued without legal authority."

Our distinguished Senator, Mr. Benjamin, has been attacked, and his course in Congress with regard to the confirmation by the act of June 2, 1858, of this and other claims reported upon favorably by the Board of Commissioners in 1811, has been denounced in most violent terms by parties interested in the defeat of the Houmas claim. He has been accused of "smuggling" the bill through Congress, and of lending himself to the promotion of the interests of his colleague, to the injury of worthy and innocent settlers, etc. Happily for him, if he need any defence in the eyes of the great mass of a constituency which he has so well and so ably served—the journals of Congress remain as a record of all that is done there. They show that in the Senate, the bill which finally became the

law so much complained of, was referred to the Committee on Private Land Claims, and that on the 6th of February, 1857, a unanimous report was made in its favor, with amendments, giving the reasons why the confirmations which had been so long delayed should no longer be postponed. This was at the Second Session of the Thirty-fourth Congress. At the First Session of the Thirty-fifth Congress, the same Committee again reported favorably of the measure, on the 12th of March, 1858, the reports in each case being printed and furnished to every member of each House for information. After passing the Senate, the bill went down to the House, on the 19th of April, 1858; was referred to its Committee on Private Land Claims, whose Chairman was the Hon. J. M. Sandige, of this State, on the 12th of May ; was reported back on the 29th May; and passed June 1st, 1858. Now, how much more time and opportunity for the examination of this claim could have reasonably been asked by Representatives watchful of the rights or interests of their constituents ? Besides, the bill carefully reserves the rights of all adverse claimants, and permits their being tested in any court or courts of justice, thus securing to the very men who have been most conspicuous in this work of denunciation of Mr. Benjamin, the benefit of their own State tribunals, and even juries of the vicinage to try their causes and maintain their rights, if any they have.

Were one to credit the clamor and out-cry which have been raised by the adverse claimants and the journals and newspaper correspondents in their interest, he would conclude that the Houmas Claim was the only one confirmed by the second section of the Act of 1858. But such, in truth, is far from being the case, for the report of Mr. Gallatin embraced hundreds of claims—many of which still remained unacted on by Congress —and the effect of the act will be to remove a cloud from the land titles of a large number of our citizens, which has hung for near sixty years, through the dilatoriness of Congress, over their homes and plantations, which have grown so much in value during this lapse of time as now to be worth millions of dollars; at the same time it will remove, in no inconsiderable degree, one of the greatest obstacles to our prosperity arising from this state of uncertainty and dispute as to titles to land.

Mr. Slidell, too, comes in for his share of denunciation, and has been

held up before the community on the charge of prostituting his high office for his private benefit. Committee men, anonymous newspaper correspondents, and conductors of journals, notoriously and bitterly hostile to him, assert that he owns more than twenty-two thousand acres of the Houmas claim, which they value at a million of dollars. I addressed a note to this gentleman, asking such documentary or other evidence with regard to the claim, as he might have in his possession. It appears that, in 1836, nine gentlemen, of which Mr. Slidell was one, became the purchasers of an interest of ninety-thousand four hundred and thirty superficial arpents included in the Houmas claim, at the price of two dollars and fifty cents the arpent, for which a cash payment was made in part, and notes given for the remaining payments at from one to six years' date. The purchasers sfterwards complained of combination and misrepresentation on the part of their seller, and one of their own number as to the quality of the lands, and also of defect of title, fear of eviction, disturbance, etc. The plaintiff, however, recovered, in a subsequent action in injunction, brought by Mr. Slidell against Rightor, the vendor, and his wife (3 Annual Reports, 199) the Supreme Court of this State, by Judge Rost, said that Mr. Slidell had examined the titles and found them satisfactory. Indeed, on no occasion, or in any manner, has Mr. Slidell ever said that the title to the Houmas grant was not a good and valid one ; his objection having been to that of Rightor. As to the immense value of the land owned by Mr. Slidell, the assessors of Ascension parish for years past have valued it at the moderate sum of *fifteen thousand dollars ;* and fixed its area at ten thousand superficial arpents. If any one wishes to make a speculation by buying Mr. Slidell's interest, I learn that he will cheerfully sell it for forty thousand dollars, on a long credit, which sum does not approach the amount it cost him in principal, interest and taxes.

In justice to that gentleman, I enclose you a copy of the letter which he wrote in answer to my note addressed to him, because you will see from it what has been his entire course in Congress with regard to the claim, and how little he is amenable to censure, in the matter, from fair and impartial men.

I have thus laid before you what, I trust, will be found a candid and fair

history and review of the Houmas Claim—indicating the means of information on the subject, which are open to all who desire to investigate it, and form their own opinions.

In conclusion, I trust, also, that you will perceive how little our two distinguished Senators are worthy of the wholesale detraction and abuse which have been showered upon them from hostile quarters. They are men to both of whom the State of Louisiana owes much for great and signal services, and to all right-minded citizens their characters and reputations should be cherished objects.

Your friend and servant,

JOHN CLAIBORNE.

HON. C. T. BEMISS, Jefferson Parish.

LETTER FROM THE HON. JOHN SLIDELL TO JOHN CLAIBORNE.

My Dear Sir: I have your note of the 7th inst., asking me to communicate any facts or documents in relation to the Houmas claims, and the legislation of Congress on those claims and others of a similar character. I send you herewith various papers bearing on the subject, and think that they will furnish the required information. It is my intention, at the meeting of Congress, to call up and refer the petition of certain inhabitants of the parish of Ascension, which was presented towards the close of the last session, with the view of having a report thereon, giving a full history of the claim and a review of all the facts connected with it. My colleague, Mr. Benjamin, as Chairman of the Senate Committee of Private Land Claims, to whom the petition was referred, reported, two or three days before the adjournment of Congress, a joint resolution directing the Secretary of Interior to suspend the issuing of patents for the lands embraced in the 2d section of the Act of the 2d of June, 1858, until the close of the next session of Congress. The reason for this action of the Committee was, that there was not sufficient time for the investigation of the case before the adjournment. The joint resolution was passed by a dispensation of the rules (which the objection of a single Senator would have prevented) through all its stages, and sent to the House, on the day of its introduction, where it was passed in like manner. You have seen enough of the mode of

doing business in Congress to know that if either my colleague or I had wished to offer the slightest indirect obstacle to the passage of the resolution, it could not possibly have gone through its several readings in both Houses before the adjournment; the patents for the Houmas lands would have been issued by this time—when issued, they will add nothing to the validity of a title which is already complete. The petition of the inhabitants of Ascension, and the resolutions said to have been adopted at a public meeting at New River, were concocted by persons having no pecuniary interest in the matter, and gotten up for purposes purely political. They contain assertions which their authors knew to be false. My individual share of the land is ten thousand arpents, or eight thousand acres; it is represented to be twenty-two thousand acres, worth one million of dollars. You will find among the papers sent you my tax bill for the last year, by which you will see that my interest of ten thousand arpents is estimated by the sworn Assessors of the parish at fifteen thousand dollars. I believe that it has never been assessed, during the twenty-three years that I have been paying taxes on it, at a higher rate.

Judge Campbell is said to have set aside the patents in two of the Houmas cases, on the ground that the claim was fraudulent. You have a copy of the opinion; by it you will perceive that he expressly declared that the title was not in question before him; that he scrupulously abstained from any allusion to its merits, but decreed the patents to be cancelled, on the ground that the Secretary of the Treasury had signed them without authority of law. No patent was ever issued for the William Conway tract, in which I am interested, and consequently no suit was brought in relation to it. The number of families settled on the different tracts is said to be five hundred. This is a gross exaggeration; but whatever may be the number, they have, each and all of them, made their settlements with the full knowledge that they were trespassers and invaders of rights as sacred and complete as those of any proprietor in Louisiana.

In 1836, that tract of the Houmas grant which I and others then purchased, was an unbroken wilderness, known imperfectly to the surveyors and to a very few adventurous hunters, who with great difficulty could make their way from the Mississippi to the Amite. If you will take the trouble to look into the list of pre-emption claims in the Register's office,

you will not, I think, find one on the land purchased from Rightor ; all the settlements have been made since. I paid for my share $25,114 98, average cash term 17th May, 1839 ; that share, with proportion of taxes and other expenses and interest not compounded, stands me in over $70,000. I will gladly take for it $40,000, and give a long credit at a moderate rate of interest. You are hereby authorized to sell it for me on those terms.

In this matter I entertain no ill feeling toward the simple-minded signers of the memorial, with whom I and my co-proprietors are prepared to deal most liberally. They are the mere tools of unscrupulous knaves, combined to effect by any agencies, however base, the gratification of their personal malice, and the improvement of their broken political fortunes.

My colleague introduced the amendment confirming the Louisiana claims, and carried the bill through without consulting me, directly or indirectly. I think that I can attest without qualification, that we never exchanged a word on the subject until he informed me that it had been returnad from the House of Representatives. I never spoke of it, in any stage of its progress, to any member of either House of Congress, nor, indeed, to any one in Washington. By referring to the papers I have given you, you will see that it has been considered during two sessions, and accompanied by printed reports. You know that these printed bills and reports are placed in possession of every member of both Houses ; and if Mr. Miles Taylor knew, as he pretends, nothing of it, it betrays gross inattention to his duties ; if he did, his attempt now to screen himself from responsibility to his constituents on New River, by insinuations of trick and concealment, can only be qualified by terms which it would be in bad taste to express, but which are not the less deserved.

You are perfectly at liberty to make such use of this letter as you may deem proper.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN SLIDELL.

JOHN CLAIBORNE, Esq.

New Orleans, ~~February~~ 11, 1859.